

IOWA STATE PARKS VOLUNTEER HOST GUIDE

Thank you for volunteering for the Iowa State Parks! We hope you will enjoy your experience with State Parks. Your contribution will provide park visitors with an extra measure of quality service.

This guide will help you fulfill your duties successfully. You will receive additional orientation information and materials that are park specific from your supervisor at the park. You also will receive any training necessary for you to safely perform the duties and tasks outlined in your campground agreement.

State Parks Mission

Our mission is: To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations, to improve the quality of life for Iowans and ensure a legacy for all generations.

Iowa State Parks

Iowa has over 84 widely diverse state parks. Visitors to state parks can select from a variety of lodging options ranging from primitive or full hook-up campsites to group camps, yurts and cabins. Recreation opportunities include not only the traditional picnicking, hiking and boating, but also windsurfing scuba diving and rock climbing!

Purpose of this Booklet

- To help hosts maintain the excellent level of service currently being provided for visitors.
- To assist in training new volunteers to be hosts.
- To serve as a handy reference for information on hosting.
- To help insure a safe, satisfying volunteer experience for hosts.

It is hard to imagine what our parks would be like without the continued efforts and support of volunteers like you!

Being a Volunteer Host

Expectations of Hosts

- All hosts are expected to maintain clean, orderly campsites.
- Hosts must check with the manager before adding any additional structures or storage containers at their site. All plants or gardens must be grown in portable containers.
- Hosts may not perform vehicle maintenance at their site.
- State equipment shall not be used for personal benefit.
- Only camping and recreational equipment may be in public view; all other equipment must be stored out of sight.
- It is not appropriate to consume alcohol or use tobacco while on active duty. Hosts must confine use of either to their campsite during off-duty hours.
- Hosts are official representatives of the Iowa State Parks therefore they must:

- Dress appropriately.
- Avoid offensive language or conduct.
- Avoid displaying signs, decals, bumper stickers, and posters that express political or religious viewpoints. Please check with the manager.
- All dogs must be kept on a leash and have current rabies certificates.

Tips for Hosts

- Spend some time getting oriented to the area. Stop by the local Chamber of Commerce for flyers.
- During the orientation session with park staff, ask questions, clarify responsibilities and bring up concerns.
- Remember: safety first, always. Know your physical limitations and discuss any specific medical problems such as allergies, surgeries, diabetes, etc., with your park contact.
- If you are asked a question by a member of the public and you don't know the answer, tell them you will find the answer and get back to them.

Application, Agreement, and Timesheet

Applications are available at the State Parks or by contacting Keepers of the Land.

Although Iowa State Parks always need new hosts, it may be easier to get a position if you are willing to be flexible in your location choices.

After your application is received at the park, a member of the park staff will contact you either by phone or mail. You may be interviewed over the phone or in person and receive an explanation of your specific duties and responsibilities. You and the site supervisor will come to an arrangement on duties, location and dates. Once you arrive for your assignment, you will receive further training and orientation.

Field staff accepts new applications year round. Hosts always are welcome to make contact with the parks to inquire about their host status.

Timesheets should be completed and submitted to your supervisor at the end of your service or at the end of the month, whichever comes first.

What You Get in Return

- Free camping and hookups (where available).
- A "Host" sign for your campsite.
- A baseball cap and nametag.

Iowa State Parks also give service awards for milestone hours of volunteer service. These awards are based on individual hours for a calendar year.

Insurance Coverage

Medical: Campground hosts are covered by the State of Iowa Workers Compensation. If you suffer an on-the-job injury or illness, your supervisor will help you obtain and complete the proper forms to submit for processing.

Tort Liability: As a volunteer host, you are acting as an agent of Iowa State Parks. Therefore, when you are acting within the accepted limits and scope of your assigned job responsibilities, State Parks can choose to assume responsibility for tort liability claims on your behalf. All situations will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Of course, any tort claim resulting from criminal activity on a volunteer's part will not be covered by the agency.

Personal Property: A volunteer's personal belongings are not covered by State Parks. It is advisable that you carry your own insurance to cover damage to personal belongings which may occur as a result of natural disasters such as storms, ice, fire, flooding, high winds, etc.

Vehicle Insurance: You may be asked to show proof of vehicle insurance if you use your own vehicle on the job.

If special equipment or tools are required to perform your volunteer duties, you will be issued what you need and trained in their use. State Parks equipment is not to be used for your personal use.

Background Checks

You will be asked to undergo a conviction or background record check. The expense of such check will be borne by State Parks.

For your protection, you should never accept responsibility for supervising park visitors' children. Babysitting is not one of your volunteer job duties.

Interacting with Visitors

The following tips will help you become an effective Volunteer Host when greeting and assisting park visitors:

DO

- Be a good listener.
- Be polite and friendly, with a desire to be helpful.
- Be positive about the park, staff and rules.
- Be a good neighbor. Set a good example by obeying the park rules yourself.
- Be familiar with park rules and regulations so you can explain them when asked or when you see a violation. Hand out an appropriate brochure if available. If the violation continues, report it to the park manager.
- Give out accurate information. If you can't answer a question, check with park staff or refer the visitor to the Information Center.
- Refer campers with complaints to the park manager or your supervisor.
- Wave as you walk by and SMILE.

DON'T

- Don't try to enforce rules.
- Don't argue, scold or "chew out" the visitor.
- Don't be harsh, sharp, abrupt, hurried or impatient.
- Don't act like a know-it-all or be self-righteous.

- Don't be a busybody. Respect campers' privacy and their right to "get away" from it all.
- Don't be the park bartender. Use common sense and discretion when consuming alcohol. Keep beverages in your campsite, and please don't over do it. As a Volunteer Host, you want to be alert and at your best.

Providing Information

The more you know, the more confident you'll feel as you perform your host duties and the more helpful you can be to park visitors. But please don't think we expect you to know the answer to every question you'll be asked. Even the supervisors get asked questions they can't answer. Never be embarrassed to admit to a visitor that you don't know the answer to a question. Tell them you will try to find the answer and get back to them. If the answer isn't in your host packet, check with your supervisor.

Your supervisor or the local Chamber of Commerce or Visitor Information Bureau can provide you with additional information on local attractions and events.

Business Enterprises

Conducting business, such as selling items/products or performing services for pay, within the park is not allowed.

Evaluating your Host Experience

As a volunteer host serving in Iowa State Parks you will be asked to evaluate your hosting experience, park staff and facilities, plus comment on additional training or information needed to assist you in performance of your duties. We will appreciate your honest assessment of your experience as a way to help us identify needed improvements such as providing additional information or training. The park manager, or your supervisor, will complete the bottom section of the evaluation form.

After you have read through this guide and the brochures, please talk with your supervisor if you have any questions or concerns about hosting in State Parks.

Host Duties

- ✓ Greeting and assisting visitors, informing them of common park and facility rules, answering questions and receiving comments about the park, facility and surrounding area.
- ✓ Distributing maps, brochures and facility information to individuals and groups.
- ✓ Replenishing restroom and facility supplies when park staff are not present. Hosts may be requested to help make sure restroom facilities have adequate toilet paper and paper towels in the dispensers, floors are picked up or swept, or light bulbs are functioning and replaced when needed. Some parks may have the host assist in stocking the restroom storage areas.
- ✓ Promoting care of the park or facility by keeping a clean site and performing minor maintenance tasks such as picking up litter or light duties as outlined by the park manager. Clean facilities and grounds actually help prevent the spread of litter in addition to providing a welcome sight to incoming visitors.

- ✓ Being a visible representative of the park or facility with a sufficient and comfortable knowledge of park and facility rules and surrounding area activities so you can explain rules plus provide information to visitors.
- ✓ Being observant for activities within the park or facility requiring immediate attention. Contacting park personnel and/or law enforcement when emergencies occur. **Remember: You are not responsible for enforcing park rules.**

Examples of general park and facility tasks:

- Picking up litter in and around campsites or facilities.
- Cleaning garbage and ash out of fire pits.
- Stacking burnable wood next to the fire pits.
- Raking sites and driving areas smooth.
- Pulling nails from tables, posts, trees.
- Removing strings and rope from trees, bushes.
- Sweeping or brushing off picnic tables.
- Clipping bush out of the way.
- Reporting any damaged tables, trees, fire pits or posts to supervisor.
- Turning on and off water system for park or facility.

Examples of some possible minor tasks:

- Raking or sweeping gravel.
- Sweeping cobwebs off buildings.
- Straightening site posts.
- Keeping bulletin board information up-to-date.
- Hosing down buildings and signs.
- Pruning shrubs and trees.
- Trimming or weeding grass.
- Minor repairs to picnic tables, buildings, ramp and docks.
- Checking facility kitchen; opening shelters; posting Group Reservation signs.
- Fixing fences.

Camper Registration Duties

As Hosts you may be asked to help with the following camper registration duties that do not involve handling park funds:

- ✓ Keeping track of occupied and vacant campsites.
- ✓ Directing campers to vacant sites.
- ✓ Reminding campers to register at booth or self-registration stations.
- ✓ Assisting park staff in redirecting traffic if camp area is full.
- ✓ Posting "Camp Area Full" sign.
- ✓ Keeping track of campers and number of nights in park.
- ✓ Filling out registration sheet.
- ✓ Pulling old tags off campsite posts.
- ✓ Informing incoming campers where family or friends are located.
- ✓ Directing picnickers to day-use area.
- ✓ Answering questions on registration procedures in your park that may include:
 - Where and when do campers pay?
 - Can campers pay for more than one night at a time?
 - Are travelers' checks, Canadian money, or personal checks accepted?
 - Where and when can firewood be purchased?

- Once registered can a camper leave the park and get back in if the gate is closed?
- Does the park give refunds?
- Can I pay for my friend's site?

Handling Difficult Situations

Most visitors enjoy the use of our state parks without committing any serious violations or disturbances, and most people who do violate park rules will respond to a friendly greeting and education or information on the rules.

If you observe visitors breaking the rules after informing or presenting them with verbal information or brochures **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO** further resolve or correct the problem. Contact your supervisor and proceed in the following manner:

1. **Keep Calm.** Assess the situation carefully to determine if enforcement is needed and notify park staff. Park rangers have police powers and are specially trained to handle such situations.
2. If park rangers are not available and a serious violation or disturbance is occurring, call the nearest available police or sheriff.
3. Please do not ignore obvious rule violations. Minor or small violations can become serious problems. If in doubt, report activities to your supervisor.
4. Take good notes. Jot down descriptions, site and license plate numbers. Report clear, accurate and concise information to the park ranger.

Safety

Host Safety

Your safety is very important! The state of Iowa provides Workers Compensation medical coverage for volunteers who receive job-related injuries. We hope all volunteers will have pleasant and injury-free experiences.

Here are a few tips to keep you "safe and sound" while volunteering your services in our parks:

- ✓ Know your physical limitations! Discuss with your supervisor any physical limitations you may have prior to starting your hosting duties. Remember the park variables (size, location, facilities and use) determine duties, and because of these variables, some parks are much more demanding!
- ✓ Use your legs, not your back, when lifting objects.
- ✓ Don't operate unfamiliar tools or machinery without training.
- ✓ Let your supervisor know if you have any health conditions that staff should be aware of in case of an emergency, i.e., medications, allergies, existing medical condition.
- ✓ Let your supervisor know if you are diabetic, epileptic, or have any other medical problem, plus where you keep your medication. It should be readily accessible.
- ✓ Ask your supervisor for gloves, eye protectors, or other protective equipment if needed. We have asked that parks not allow Hosts to use chemicals. State

law requires that workers be trained in the use and hazards of various chemicals.

- ✓ Dress properly for your tasks. Wear sturdy shoes and proper clothing.
- ✓ Attend park safety meetings.

Park and Visitor Safety

As volunteer hosts, be aware of potential safety hazards to park visitors and report them to your supervisor.

Examples of safety hazards include:

- ✓ Down or exposed wires or faulty electrical box
- ✓ Hanging limbs in trees
- ✓ Broken sprinkler heads
- ✓ Holes in trails or lawns
- ✓ Damaged tables or firepits with exposed sharp edges, nails or re-bar
- ✓ Toxic plants: poison oak, ivy or nightshade
- ✓ Burned out lights in restrooms
- ✓ Foot bridges, railings, docks with raised nail heads
- ✓ Bee or wasp nests
- ✓ Firearms

Natural safety hazards may include:

- ✓ Beaches that have no lifeguards. The water can be cold and swimmers can suffer from hypothermia.
- ✓ Cliffs or steep trails or terrain.
- ✓ Wildlife in the parks should not be fed. Animals can bite and some transmit communicable diseases.
- ✓ Plants producing berries or mushrooms can be very inviting, but do not ingest anything you don't positively know. Refer questioning visitors to the park manager.

Report all vandalism to your supervisor immediately!

Additional Safety Information

Dead Battery

If a camper asks for a battery "jump start" from your vehicle you may do so if trained on proper procedure and approved by the park manager. Some parks will assist in this area. To be sure, check with the park manager at the beginning of your stay.

Tools and Equipment

Parks do not lend out tools or equipment to visitors. Park managers are responsible for all park property.

Whether driving a park vehicle or you own rig, be a defensive driver and obey all park speed limits and rules of the road.

Emergencies

Fortunately, emergencies don't happen every day; but when you are faced with one, you need to know what to do. As a Volunteer Host, a visitor may contact you first because of

your location and visibility. You should make every attempt to contact the park ranger first, or if life threatening, notify authorities and make sure the park ranger is then notified of the emergency.

The most common types of emergencies in a park are:

- Health or injury/accident
- Disturbance
- Fire (recreational vehicle, building or facility, or forest fire)
- Lost child

To help you determine who and what number to contact in event of an emergency, ask your site supervisor. Keep information near the outside door of your camping rig and the other posted inside or in a place readily accessible.

Helpful Tips before an Emergency Occurs

- If you are first-aid certified, keep a first-aid kit on hand. Remember - do not administer any type of drugs or provide first-aid beyond the limits of your training or certification.
- Ask your supervisor where fire extinguishers, fire caches and first-aid kits are located throughout the park. You may find yourself in a situation where staff may request your assistance in bringing these aids to an emergency scene.
- Become familiar with your park. Know where specific sites, facilities and park staff residences are located. Know where pay telephones are located. Check with your supervisor on what type of communications will be maintained between the Host and the park ranger.
- Always keep a notepad and pen/pencil handy to jot down information.

Remember: Your safety always comes first!

What to do in the event of an emergency

- ✓ **KEEP CALM.** Assess the situation quickly but rationally.
- ✓ **Contact the park manager, park ranger, or other park staff.** Send a bystander, if necessary, to get park personnel.
- ✓ Administer first-aid or CPR **ONLY** if you are trained and certified.
- ✓ Never administer any medication to other people.

If the Park Manager or Staff is not available...

Health, Injury or Accident

1. If you have any doubt as to the extent of injury or serious illness **CALL 911** or an ambulance. Send a bystander, if necessary, to make the call if you cannot leave the scene. Make sure they know the **PARK, SITE NUMBER OR AREA, and TYPE OF EMERGENCY.**

Example: "You! Go call 911 (or an ambulance) to the Stone State Park, site number 14, there is a possible heart attack..."

2. Contact the State Patrol if vehicles are involved in an accident. Send a bystander if necessary to make a phone call. Make sure the bystander knows the **PARK<**

SITE NUMBER or ARA, and TYPE OF ACCIDENT (non-injury or injury).
Assist with first-aid, if trained; if not, try to comfort the injured or direct traffic.
DO NOT remove any vehicles or materials (even broken glass) if there has been an injury. Traffic accidents are considered crime scenes.

3. Contact the local Sheriff's Office in an event of a boating accident or boating related injury or death.

Disturbance

1. Contact the Sheriff if there is domestic fighting, thefts, assaults, minors drinking, evidence of drug use, or rowdy behavior. **DO NOT ATTEMPT** to solve the problem yourself. You are not responsible for settling disputes or getting involved with dangerous situations. **Do GET license plate numbers and descriptions, if possible WITHOUT endangering yourself.** Remember: **Domestic fighting is potentially the most dangerous situation you can encounter.** Direct Sheriff to area. Tell the officer if you noticed drugs, alcohol, weapons or dogs at the site.

Fire (Follow all directions from fire officials_

1. Quickly (but calmly) assess the situation.
2. Contact the Fire Department of RV, facility or brush/forest fires. The Department of Natural Resources should also be contacted in brush or forest fires. Give accurate location and type of fire.
3. Use caution around RV fires. Keep campers away from propane tanks that may explode.

Lost Child

1. Get an accurate description of the child including name, sex, hair, eye and skin color, height, weight, age, color clothing and unusual moles, freckles, etc.
2. Ask where and when the child was last seen and if alone or with another person.
3. Offer searching parents and friends hiking trails and remind them to double check or leave a family member at their campsite in case the child returns.
4. If the child is still missing after a thorough search of the campsite and park (about 30-60 minutes), contact the local Sheriff's office and report your information and location. You may want to contact sooner if the child is very young, last seen at nearby hazards (cliffs, beaches, lake), or darkness is approaching.
5. Report any foul play at once to Sheriff officials. Follow any instructions they may give to you.

In All Situations

1. If outside assistance has been called **MAKE SURE** someone is at the front gate (and at key locations if in large area) to provide directions to the emergency site.

2. Send a bystander if you are unavailable. Remind them to give clear directions and site number. Ask for volunteers to maintain traffic flow or keep crowds back.
3. Get accurate information and notes to report back to your supervisor. Note names, addresses, phone numbers, identification, vehicle licenses, type of injuries or damage. Our information will be needed to assist the park staff in filling out an Accident Report or Incident Report.
4. After the emergency, if possible, clean up debris or block off.

Please remember to make every attempt to contact park staff, no matter how minor an injury/accident/incident may appear.

Lost and Found

As hosts, chances are lost and found articles will be reported to you first because of your location. Ask your supervisor what steps you are to take. If you are asked to help the visitor, please get the following information:

Lost

1. Who is reporting the lost item? Get name, address and telephone number.
2. What is missing? Note color, size, make, design, unique features, value, etc.
3. How did it turn up missing? Was it left behind, stolen, loaned to another person?
4. When was it last used or seen? In a restroom, campsite, vehicle, beach, etc.,
5. Is a reward offered? Let the camper post a sign on the park bulletin board.

Found

1. Who is reporting an item found? Get name, address and telephone number.
2. Where was the item found? Note the exact location, facility, and campsite.
3. What time was the item found?
4. What type of item was found? Record as much information and description as possible.
5. Does the finder want to claim the item later?

Put a temporary tag with this information on the found item. Give the finder the park manager's name, park address and park telephone number. The park manager may provide you with the appropriate forms to give to the "finder" to fill out. Ask your supervisor what you are expected to do.

Park Rules and Regulations

The purpose of rules is to protect our park resources and visitors. As a host, you will be sharing information about rules with the public. It is important that as a representative of State Parks you provide a good example by following all the park rules yourself.

Generally, people want to know what the rules are and what behavior is acceptable, but they don't always understand why a rule is required or why compliance is important.

Please refer to the 2003 Regulations and Rate Schedule enclosed in this packet.